

**Opening Statement of Chairman Joseph Lieberman
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Hearing
“World at Risk: The Report of the Commission on the Prevention of WMD
Proliferation and Terrorism”
Washington, DC
Dec. 11, 2008**

Good morning. The importance of today’s hearing is summed up in the stark opening paragraph of the recently released report of the Commission on the Prevention of WMD Proliferation and Terrorism.

It says: “Unless the world community acts decisively and with great urgency, it is more likely than not that a weapon of mass destruction will be used in a terrorist attack somewhere in the world by the end of 2013.”

In thirty-eight words the Commission compels us to focus our minds and steel our resolve to confront the deadly, global threat of Islamist terrorists using weapons of mass destruction against innocent people and coming as it does a short time after terrorists engaged in conventional urban warfare against Mumbai. So we are, therefore, particularly grateful to the Commission for its excellent and timely report.

The Commission was established by the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act, which our Committee had a primary role in passing in 2007.

We are proud to welcome its Chairman and Vice Chairman, our former colleagues, Senators Bob Graham and Jim Talent.

I also want to welcome our former colleague from the House and a member of the 9/11 Commission Tim Roemer and Robin Cleveland whose government experience is distinguished and long.

I thank each of you, as well as your fellow commissioners and staff members, for all the hard work I know went into this insightful and gripping report.

I also want to welcome our colleagues on the Senate Armed Services Committee who have joined us in this hearing because confronting weapons of mass destruction requires the combined efforts of multiple departments and multiple committees.

We hold this hearing in the wake of last month's coordinated terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India, that originated in Pakistan and which came as no surprise to members of the commission.

In fact, your report says clearly – and I quote – “Were one to map terrorism and weapons of mass destruction today, all roads would intersect in Pakistan.”

But you also note quite correctly that Pakistan has itself been a victim of the same Islamic terrorism. Most poignantly, in 2007, former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto was assassinated and 20 bystanders killed just two weeks before the parliamentary elections.

The point here is that no one is safe from Islamist extremists and terrorists because they have no respect for borders or the lives of the innocent who live within them. London, Madrid, Bali, Mumbai, Jerusalem, New York, the Pentagon and the Pennsylvania countryside have all suffered grievous losses of life at the hands of these terrorists.

Members of the commission almost became casualties themselves when the Islamabad Marriott Hotel was bombed in September, 2008 – killing at least 50 people – just hours before commission members were scheduled to check-in there as they investigated the terrorists use of bases in Pakistan.

As brutal and blood-stained as their course has been, it can get worse. Much worse. Islamist terrorists have dedicated themselves to acquiring weapons of mass destruction so they can murder and destroy on a scale previously unimaginable.

Just last year, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency Mohamed El Baradei, said of nuclear terrorism, although it applies to all weapons of mass destruction:

“For an extremist group, there is no concept of deterrence. If they have it, they will use it.”

In fact, the IAEA handles about 150 cases a year involving trafficking of nuclear material. Some of that material

reported stolen is never recovered and some of the material recovered has never been reported stolen.

Your commission also found that biological weapons pose a very real threat. In fact, according to the commission, one more likely to materialize than other WMD because of the global proliferation of legitimate biotechnology research and expertise. This research, which can create medical and scientific breakthroughs, can also be used to build weapons of mass bio-terror.

And much of this research takes place in very poorly secured or totally unsecured facilities.

The bottom line is we need a strong homeland and global response to protect us from danger.

Your report comes at an opportune moment, as a new Administration and a new Congress get ready to take a new look at our nation's homeland security and our global war against terrorists who attacked us on 9/11 2001.

Your range of recommendations provides a bipartisan roadmap for the urgent action needed to protect the American people. I would say your report and recommendations, together with the work our committee had some on WMD and terrorism – will be at the center of this committee’s agenda and perhaps others’ in the 111th Congress.

The questions you and we have raised and the specter of a WMD terrorist attack you and we have foreseen are not comforting but they are real, and they are our responsibility to raise in a post 9/11 world.

Those are the stakes. And we thank you Senators Graham and Talent, former Congressman Roemer and Commissioner Cleveland for laying them out before the American people – and the people of the world – so that we may unite to act in the common cause of a safer and better future for all of us.

Again, thank you for joining us today.

Senator Collins.